

المرجع	IOR/L/PS/18/B248
العنوان	"أحد حكام الصحراء"
التاريخ/ التواريخ	١٩١٦ (ميلادي)
لغة الكتابة	الإنجليزية في اللاتينية
الحجم والشكل	ملف واحد (٤ ورقات)
المؤسسة المالكة	المكتبة البريطانية: أوراق خاصة وسجلات من مكتب الهند
حق النشر	رخصة حكومة مفتوحة

حول هذا السجلّ

كتب هذه الوثيقة جيرترود بيل، مسؤول الاتصال والمراسل في القاهرة، يسرد فيها بإيجاز تفاصيل زيارة عبد العزيز بن سعود إلى البصرة في ٢٧ نوفمبر ١٩١٦ كجزء من حملة بلاد الرافدين. ويصف بيل أيضًا ما يلي:

- كيفية وصول ابن سعود إلى السلطة ونفوذه في العالم العربي؛
- علاقته بالبريطانيين؛
- مظهره؛
- شخصيته.



1. 102

B 248

(107)

A RULER OF THE DESERT.

The visit to Basrah on November 27th of Ibn Sa'ud was an episode in the Mesopotamian campaign no less picturesque to the onlookers than it was significant to those who have studied the course of Arabian politics. For the past century the history of the interior of the peninsula has centred round the rivalry between the Amirs of Northern and Southern Najd, Ibn Rashid and Ibn Sa'ud. When 'Abdul 'Aziz, the present representative of the house of Sa'ud, was a boy of 15 the power of the Rashid touched its zenith; the great Amir Muhammad, Doughty's grudging host, drove the Sa'ud into exile and occupied their capital, Riyadh. For 11 years 'Abdul 'Aziz ate the bread of adversity, but in 1902 the Shaikh of Kuwait, on the Persian Gulf, himself at enmity with the Rashid, saw in the young Amir a promising weapon, and gave him his chance. With a force of some eighty camel riders supplied by Kuwait, 'Abdul 'Aziz swooped down upon Riyadh, surprised Ibn Rashid's garrison, slew his representative and proclaimed his own accession from the recaptured city. The story of his bold adventure is part of the stock in trade of Beduin reminiscence - the arrival of the tiny band at dusk in the palm gardens south of the town, the halt till nightfall, the scaling of the palace wall by 'Abdul 'Aziz and eight picked followers, the flash of steel which roused and silenced the sleeping foe and at dawn the throwing open of the city gates to the comrades of the victor. The struggle was not over with the capture of Riyadh. In a contest renewed year after year 'Abdul 'Aziz recovered the territories of his fathers and made for himself a name which filled the echoing deserts. At length in 1913 his restless energy brought him into fields of wider political importance. He seized the Turkish province of Hasa, formerly an appanage of Riyadh, ejected the Ottoman garrisons and established himself on the seaboard of the Persian Gulf. Nothing was more certain than that his appearance on the coast must ultimately bring him into direct contact with Great Britain.





but before the difficult question of his precise relationship to Constantinople had been adjusted, the outbreak of war with Turkey released us from all obligation to preserve a neutral attitude. In the winter of 1914-15 Captain Shakespear, formerly our Political Agent at Koweit, made his way into Najd and joined Ibn Sa'ud , who was marching north to repel the attack of Ibn Rashid, engineered and backed by the Turks. The two forces met towards the end of January in an indecisive engagement in which Captain Shakespear, though he was present as a non-combatant, was wounded and killed. We lost in him a gallant officer whose knowledge of Central Arabia and rare skill in handling the tribesmen marked him out for a useful and distinguished career. His deeds lived after him. Less than a year later Ibn Sa'ud met Sir Percy Cox, Chief Political Officer of the Occupied Territories, and Chief Political Agent of the Gulf and concluded a formal agreement with Great Britain. His close connection with us has received public confirmation in a durbar of Arab Shaikhs held at Kuwait on November 20th, where he was invested with the K.C.I.E. On that memorable occasion three powerful Arab chiefs, the Shaikh of Muhammarah, who though a Persian subject is of Arab stock, the Shaikh of Kuwait and Ibn Sa'ud, Hakim of Najd, stood side by side in amity and concord and proclaimed their adherence to the British cause. In a speech as spontaneous as it was unexpected, Ibn Sa'ud pointed out that whereas the Ottoman Government had sought to dismember and weaken the Arab nation, British policy aimed at uniting and strengthening their leaders, and the Chief Political Officer as he listened to words which will be repeated and discussed round every camp fire, must have looked back on years of patient work in the Gulf and seen that they were good.

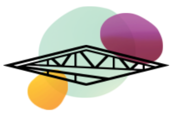
Ibn Sa'ud is now barely forty, though he looks some years older. He is a man of splendid physique, standing well over six feet, and carrying himself with the air of one accustomed to command. Though he is more massively built than the typical nomad Shaikh, he has the characteristics of the well-bred Arab, the strongly marked aquiline profile, full-fleshed nostrils,

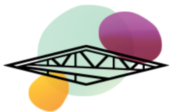




prominent lips and long narrow chin accentuated by a pointed beard. His hands are fine, with slender fingers, a trait almost universal among the tribes of pure Arab blood, and in spite of his great height and breadth of shoulder he conveys the impression, common enough in the desert, of an indefinable lassitude, not individual but racial, the secular weariness of an ancient and self-contained people, which has made heavy drafts on its vital forces and borrowed little from beyond its own forbidding frontiers. His deliberate movements, his slow sweet smile and the contemplative glance of his heavy-lidded eyes, though they add to his dignity and charm, do not accord with the Western conception of a vigorous personality. Nevertheless report credits him with powers of physical endurance rare even in hard-bitten Arabia. Among men bred in the camel saddle he is said to have few rivals as a tireless rider. As a leader of irregular forces he is of proved daring, and he combines with his qualities as a soldier that grasp of statecraft which is yet more highly prized by the tribesmen. To be "a statesman" is perhaps their final word of commendation.

Politician, ruler and raider, Ibn Sa'ud illustrates a historic type. Such men as he are the exception in any community, but they are thrown up persistently by the Arab race in its own sphere, and in that sphere they meet its needs. They furnished the conquerors and military administrators of the Mohammadan invasion, who were successful just where Ibn Sa'ud, if he had lived in a more primitive age, might have succeeded, and failed, just as in a smaller field he may fail, in the task of creating out of a society essentially tribal a united and homogeneous state of a durable nature. Muhammad al Rashid was the classic example in the generation before our own - he has been dead twenty years but his fame survives. Like him 'Abdul 'Aziz has drawn the loose mesh of tribal organization into a centralized administration and imposed on wandering confederacies an authority which, though fluctuating, is recognized as a political factor. The Sa'ud have in the palm groves of Riyadh and the oases of their northern and eastern provinces, Qasim and





Hasa, wider resources, greater wealth and a larger settled population than the Rashid, and their dominion rests therefore on a more solid foundation, but the ultimate source of power, here as in the whole course of Arab history, is the personality of the commander. Through him, whether he be an 'Abbasid Khalif or an Amir of Najd, the political entity holds, and with his disappearance it breaks.

If the salient feature of the Kuwait durbar was the recognition by the assembled Arab chiefs of the good will of Great Britain towards their race, it was the presence of an unchanging type of desert sovereignty, among conditions so modern that they had scarcely grown familiar to those who created them, which gave Ibn Sa'ud's visit to Basrah its distinctive colour. In the course of a few hours the latest machinery of offence and defence was paraded before him. He watched the firing of high explosives at an improvised trench and the bursting of anti-air craft shells in the clear heaven above. He travelled by a railway not six months old, and sped across the desert in a motor car to the battle field of Sha'aibah, where he inspected British infantry and Indian cavalry, and witnessed a battery of artillery come into action. In one of the base hospitals, housed in a palace of our good friend the Shaikh of Muhammarah, he was shown the bones of his own hand under the Röntgen ray. He walked along the great wharfs on the Shatt al Arab, through the heaped stores from which an army is clothed and fed, and saw an aeroplane climb up the empty sky. He looked at all these things with wonder, but the interest which he displayed in the mechanism of warfare was that of a man who seeks to learn, not of one who stands confused, and unconsciously he justified to the officers who were his hosts the reputation he has gained in Arabia for sound sense and distinguished bearing.

"It is good for us" said the Shaikh of Muhammarah, as the two chiefs took their leave, "to see your might." Those who heard him may well have found their thoughts reverting to a might greater and more constant than that of the War Lord, and looked forward to the day when we shall expound the science of peace instead of the science of destruction.

